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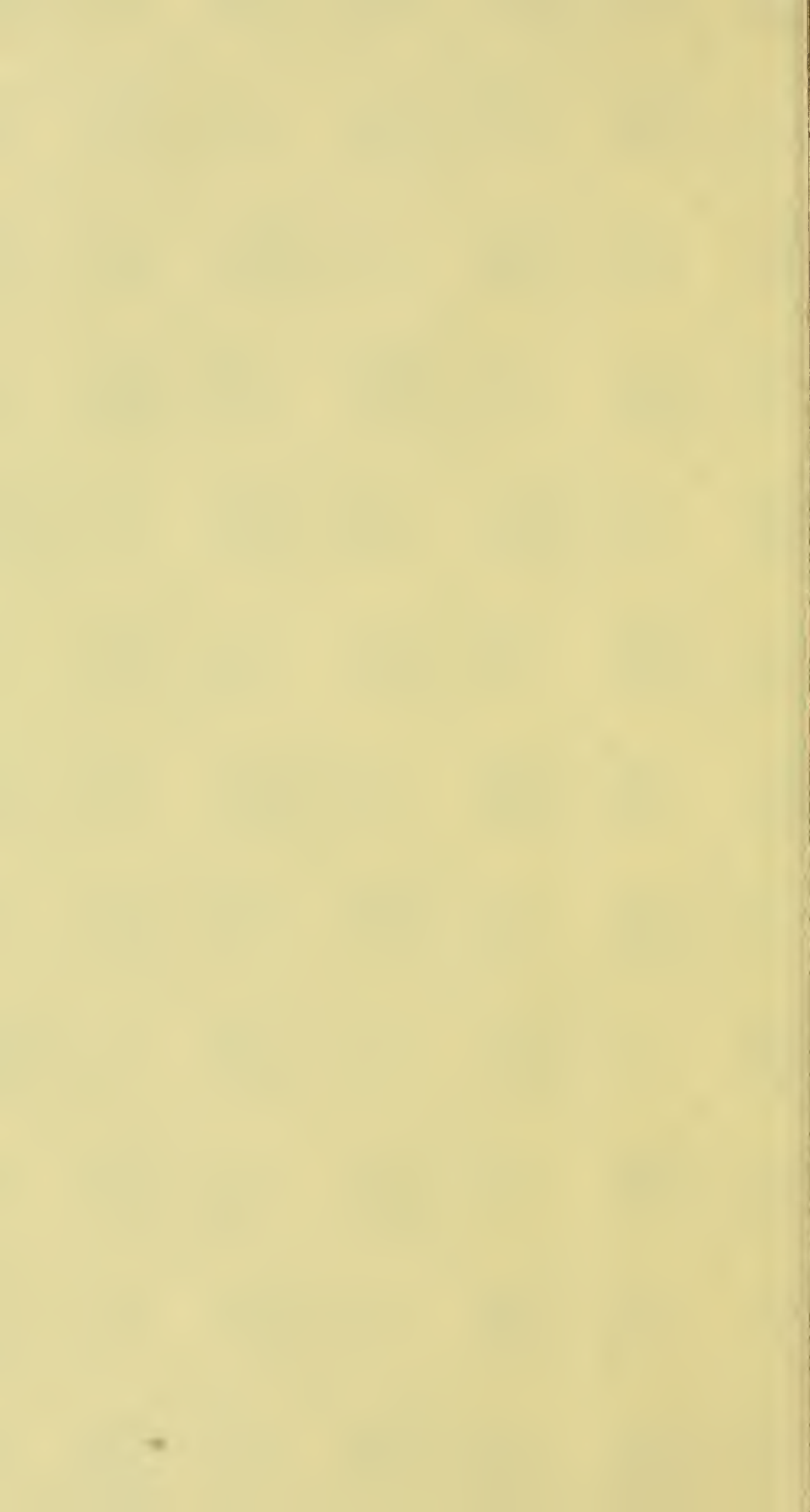
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# SPEECH

BEFORE AN AUXILIARY OF THE

AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY,

Utica, January 13, 1834.

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BY A. B. JOHNSON.

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## TO THE READER.

CONTRARY to his original expectation and present wishes, the author of the following remarks is impelled to publish them, both by the request of many persons, and the greater urgency of avoiding misconception. Having never been a member of any society for either abolition or colonization, and intending never to be of either, he simply means to enjoy, on these subjects, the independence of thought and action which the laws and his circumstances in life enable him to maintain. Anxious, however, to respect the feelings of every human being, he would have presented his views with less pungency of illustration, had not the terms of debate precluded amplification, by limiting every speech to thirty minutes. Yet no offence he trusts can be justly excited by any of his remarks, if the reader will remember that guilt exists in intention alone. Any act, even the death of an individual, is either virtuous or criminal, according as the intention of the actor is virtuous or vicious. The most skilful physician that exists has doubtless caused the death of many persons, when he deemed himself engaged in the most benign acts of mercy. If, however, you can show a physician that his prescriptions are deleterious, you may fairly denounce the medicine, without criminating the physician. Having, then, in the following remarks, both at their commencement and conclusion, disclaimed all imputation against the motives of the Colonization Society and its supporters, (and to act differently would be insanity,) the author trusts that the reader will constantly discriminate that the remarks are intended to illustrate the speaker's views of the moral tendency and character of the acts of the Colonization Society, and hence cannot detract from the highly meritorious intentions with which those acts are performed.





## RESOLUTION.

“RESOLVED, That this meeting deeply deplore the unfortunate condition of the colored population of this country; and commend to the zealous support of the philanthropist and the Christian, the American Colonization Society, as the instrument, under Providence, which is best calculated to ameliorate the condition of the free negro, and secure the ultimate emancipation of the slave.”

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## ADDRESS.

MR. CHAIRMAN :

As I intend to vote on the resolution which is before this meeting, and as I shall vote differently from many of my friends who are present, I perhaps owe to them, and I owe to myself, to state some of the reasons that will influence me in the vote which I shall give.

I avow the highest respect and esteem for the motives of the Colonization Society and its supporters. I doubt not they deem themselves engaged in the most effectual methods of benefiting colored men, of Christianizing and civilizing Africa, and of strengthening the interests and institutions of our country. Nay, the intelligence and patriotism which are united under the banners of the Society, constitute the most formidable difficulties in the cause which I am to advocate. Even on this floor we find among its friends those to whom we look for the exemplification of every virtue; especially am I constrained to notice one, whose honest zeal in this cause is but an emanation of the zeal which often delights me, as I occasionally hear him, vehement in the cause of righteousness, in the sacred desk. Still, I am bound either to forego all the dictates of my judgment, or to declare that I believe the Society and its supporters are mistaken as to the moral nature of their institution.

'The Society proceeds on the assumption that it will colonize free people of color with their own assent. This alone reconciles community to the proceedings of the Society. Still, in this fundamental feature, the proceedings of the Society are based on a fallacy.

In some countries of Europe no criminal can be executed unless by his own consent; that is, he must confess himself guilty. Without this confession, the most positive testimony is insufficient to convict him. This provision, so theoretically strong in favor of prisoners, is practically the means in many cases of condemning the innocent. The process consists in applying tortures to a suspected person until he shall confess himself guilty.

To my apprehension, the confession of guilt, thus extorted, is analogous to the assent of colored men to be transported to Liberia. We apply to their minds a torture which is as effective in compelling a consent to be transported to Africa, as physical tortures are effective in compelling a consent to be executed.

The degradations which beset the colored man are ever present. He cannot enter a church, a canal-boat, a tavern, a steam-boat, without being consigned, regardless of all his merits, be they perchance ever so great, to the most degraded position. He is practically excluded from every post of honor and profit which usually stimulate other men to virtue and industry. Who ever heard of a black juryman, a black lawyer, a black judge, a black physician? What merchant will take a black shopman? what mechanic a black apprentice? In the absence of all stimulants which excite white men to honor, I am surprised at the decency, (be it ever so little,) that colored people exhibit, of even this state. Were they as open in their sensuality as the beasts of our fields, I could not accuse them with their excesses; for the principle, "Eat, drink, and be merry; for to-morrow we die," is unmitigatingly applicable to their condition. Were they more idle than they confessedly are, more reckless of consequences, more regardless of reputa-

tion, and every way worthless, I could not upbraid them with these miserable attributes. I can see in my own bosom a sufficient reason for their depravity, in the treatment which they receive at our hands.

Far be from me any accusation against my white fellow citizens. I am stating facts of which I may be as guilty as any other man. I merely show that men thus situated are as effectually coerced to yield their assent to transportation, as the poor wretch on the wheel of torture yields his assent to be executed. Believing this, I say we act fallaciously when we soothe our consciences towards African colonization, by saying that we colonize none but those who assent to be transported.

This is not the only fallacy which is connected with the colonization cause. We further soothe our consciences in sending the blacks to Africa, by saying that though the whites, whom we have sent as missionaries and officers, die with terrific rapidity, yet the blacks, being indigenous to the climate, enjoy a greater immunity from disease than the whites. This position I deny. Exemption from the diseases of climate is not inheritable. It is a personal privilege, which attaches to those alone who are born in the climate, and which is forfeited by a removal from the climate.

Are we not told that emigrants from the south suffer less from the climate than emigrants from the north? Is not this alone sufficient proof that the climate regards not where the emigrant's ancestors were born, but simply where the emigrant himself was nurtured?

I entertain another objection to the Colonization Society. No principle is clearer to my mind than that God's commandments include equally white men and black. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is as obligatory on us in relation to colored men, as the command, "Thou shalt do no murder." If the last forbids us to kill a black man, the former commands us to love a black man as we love a white. If either is applicable to a black man, both are.

Like the reverend gentleman who addressed us on Thursday evening, on behalf of colonization, I am fond of reverting to these elements of duty. Some persons may think they possess no connexion with the question, but I deem them important. Christianity has so moulded our views of right and wrong, of virtue and vice, that we can in no way so effectually settle the morality of any question, as by ascertaining its religious character. Many men think that their conduct is uninfluenced by the Bible, and independent of it; but they are mistaken. A man may doubt whether he shall be judged by the Bible in the world to come; but he is a superficial observer, if he discover not that in this life at least he is judged by the Bible. His acts must be regulated by it, to a degree at least, if he would not be an outcast from society.

Females are told, and correctly, of the peculiar obligations of their sex to the Christian religion. I believe the blacks may be told with equal propriety of their obligations to Christianity. Of all men they should the most revere religion. We heard, on Thursday night, that in Rome four hundred slaves were massacred, because their master had been murdered, and the murderer, who was supposed to be one of the slaves, could not be discovered. This butchery was said to be the regular law of that civilized empire. Whether this was before Christianity, or subsequently, we are not informed; but it could but have been in the infancy of the Christian era. What, think you, prevents similar outrages now? Is it our humanity? Possibly; but it is our humanity as formed and modified by our religion. The blacks are indebted to Christianity for even the trouble and expense that are taken to remove them to Africa. Were we like the Romans, or rather like the Spartans, to whom we were also referred, we should probably like them find a far less expensive and more expeditious way of removing our blacks, than the slow process of colonization.

Religion, then, effects much for the blacks; and it may effect more, till they shall enjoy all the benefits which result from an entire conformity of our conduct with Christian principles.



“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” If this command be applicable to our conduct towards colored men as fully as to our conduct towards white men, and if Christianity be an authoritative reality, this single command involves the whole merits of our controversy. Now I call on the clergy who are present, to tell me if this command is not intended to embrace our conduct towards the blacks? I call on them to answer this question distinctly.

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Is this a command which expediency can annul? If expediency can annul this command, expediency can annul the Sabbath, expediency can annul the decalogue, expediency can annul the Bible itself, and Christianity with it. I call on clergymen to maintain such a doctrine if they dare, either openly or covertly, either by precept or practice, either by inference or by consequence. They may as well preach deism, as that our conduct towards the blacks is not sinful.

If, then, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” is authoritative over our conduct towards the blacks, I object to the Colonization Society that it is an instrument and means by which our violation of the above command is gratified. The Society removes the blacks to Africa, because we insist on violating this command. The Society thus, like a brothel, makes itself subservient to the sin of the community.

Is a society with such an object to be fostered by our churches? Is it to be taken under the special care of our clergy? Is it to be the theme of their eulogy on the Sabbath, and the object of their prayers at any time? No. If such a society must exist, let the clergy keep aloof from it. Let them enforce on the consciences of men the law of God, which, when obeyed, will render the Society useless, rather than enforce on the feeble and debased blacks that God’s law cannot be obeyed, and that their only refuge is this Society.

In all ordinary cases of hatred between man and man, that is, when the parties are white men, our ministers will not lend themselves to gratify the prejudices of one party, by transport-



ing from his home and country the injured individual; our ministers will fearlessly go to the persecutor, or send to him their session, or other ecclesiastical coadjutors, and tell the offender that he must repent, or expect no fellowship in this world, and no forgiveness in the next. These opposite courses of conduct to the black man and the white cannot both be right; and I call on our clergy to beware lest they give infidelity occasion to infer from their practice that they disbelieve their own precepts.

I admit that, at present, as we have been exultingly told, all the ecclesiastical authorities of our country are with this Society, and nearly all the Christian ministry. They are but men; and the missionary aspect of the Society has blinded them to its real character. They are in this particular like Ambrosio, the saint of Madrid, who was seduced by a demon, under the semblance of the Virgin Mother. Nothing but the missionary character of the Colonization Society has enabled it for a moment to sustain itself with Christians; and in this particular they have yet to learn, and they are fast learning, that they are violating the injunction which prohibits them from effecting good by means that are evil.

By the sufferance of this meeting, the resolution before us is discussed as though it presented for our decision the relative merits of colonization to Africa, and immediate, universal emancipation. The question limits us to no such alternative. It presents no such issue. Nefarious, however, and incendiary, as many persons deem the theory of immediate emancipation, yet so indefensible on any principles is the Colonization Society, that I am willing it shall be tried on that issue, prejudged as it probably is by passion, and misapprehended as I suppose it to be by prejudice. Leaving then for the present the Colonization Society, I will say a few words on the theory of immediate emancipation.

All that is meant by immediate emancipation, is simply the assertion of a duty: Duty requires that all men shall emancipate their slaves immediately. Emancipation is a duty which

they owe to the slave, to Christianity, to the character of their country. I mean to assert no right of compelling the slave holder to emancipate his slave; but merely to assert the right of canvassing wherein duty lies, and the right of creating a public opinion, which shall make slave holding appear in all the sinfulness with which Christianity has invested it. We need not therefore fear that our efforts will produce disunion; for we rely on nothing for the emancipation of slaves, but the voluntary acts of slave holders themselves. We rely on nothing but what will be as operative, should the Union be severed, as it is at present. Truth and opinion circulate and ramify without being indebted to any constitutional license, nor can they be arrested by any constitutional disruption.

I yield to no man in devotion to the Union. I yield to no man in love to our southern fellow citizens. I admire the chivalrous south. Slavery itself has produced an exaltation in the character of southern men, by the conscious dignity which freedom must ever feel in the presence of slaves. Had I the power to make slave holding appear to them so sinful as to cause them to liberate their slaves, I should feel by its exercise more exalted than Napoleon; but had I the physical power to compel them to relinquish their slaves, I would rather die than exert it. To persuade them is a duty; to coerce them is a crime. Such, at least, are my understanding of the principles of abolitionists; and in these principles I see no cause for alarm at the north, no cause for offence at the south. I will not even adopt the suggestion made the other night by the agent\* of the American Colonization Society, and petition Congress to suppress slavery in the district of Columbia. I want not the sword of the law, but the peaceful and more potent sword of the Spirit, operating on the hearts of slave holders themselves. Could we force emancipation on the south, we should but remove slavery from the southern blacks, to place it on the southern whites; for what I pray you is slavery, but to be compelled to act contrary to our own volitions? Could we force emancipation on the

\* Rev. J. N. Danforth, General Agent of the Society.

south, we should ourselves be slave holders, and our white brethren at the south would be our slaves. I never have invoked the laws of man to enforce the laws of God, and I never will. The laws of God are never so potent as when they stand uncontaminated and unsupported by the passions that forever mix with our legislative support of them. We are most unjust to Christianity, if we deem it unable to conquer slavery. It has vanquished, even at the south, an enemy, in comparison with which, slavery is but a pigmy to a giant. If Christianity is able to maintain in total celibacy a large body of men and women in the most voluptuous parts of Europe; if it has been able to abolish throughout Christendom polygamy and concubinage, we need not fear the result, in its encounter with slavery.

But we are told that our views can never influence the south; that slave holders cannot hear us; and if they could hear, they would disregard our opinion. I believe experience will not justify these assertions. Within a few years the slave system has been greatly meliorated. Formerly, in some slave holding states, the murder of a slave was a slight offence, subjecting the offender to only a pecuniary penalty; while now it is statutably punishable with death. The slaves are also better fed and better clothed than formerly. These improvements were concessions to the public opinion of the north. Indeed, we must wholly mistake human nature, if we believe that southern men are insensible to the opinion which we form of their conduct; and most especially we must mistake the southern character. Of all the inhabitants of our continent, I should select southern men as the most sensitive to the breath of either approbation or censure, blow from what nook of the globe it may. Their sensitiveness is all that can make northern discussion of slavery injudicious. Fretted, as they probably are, between the embarrassments that practically attend any disruption of the ties of slavery, and the desire to free themselves from the consequences that attend the retention of slavery, (and among these consequences the public odium of the north

is not the least pressing,) they probably deem our discussions as unkind and unnecessary, as we deem them beneficial, ultimately, to even the south itself.

A gentleman the other night told us of a Carolinian, I believe, who became possessed of ten slaves. His conscience would not permit him to retain them in slavery, and he gave them their liberty. I could not see why this instance was adduced by an opponent of immediate emancipation. To me it is a powerful proof that the duty of immediate emancipation is already responded to by the consciences of slave holders, and that we possess great encouragement to persevere in preaching the doctrine loud and long.

But this benevolent slave holder was not content with manumitting his slaves; he sent them to Liberia. Here the history of this transaction ended. I wish it had been extended a little farther. I want another chapter. The *finale* would be more pertinent than all the rest to the real object of our discussion—the merits of the Colonization Society. I wish to discover what influence the Colonization Society exerted in this transaction. Did it enable this conscience stricken individual to relieve himself by something short of unconditional manumission; by commuting the pains of slavery to transportation for life to Liberia? I should also like to see the full measure of gratitude which these slaves owe to this Society, for enabling their master to satisfy his conscience by exiling them to Africa. How were the bodies of these ten human beings, men, women, and infants, prepared for the fearful disease which they were all to encounter in what is termed the seasoning? How many of these perished a miserable death amid strangers and pestilence? And how many that escaped the slaughter were found missing in the flight? for missing seems to be a term of some significance in the fearful records of colonization. Possibly this benevolent slave holder, (how thankful soever he may now feel to this Society,) may, at the day of final account, discover, that in this act of vaunted mercy and benevolence, and in this act of disburthening his conscience, he became a murderer.



I am constrained to say here, that I differ essentially from some respected individuals who the other night expressed a belief that the Colonization Society and the emancipationists are both right. I admit that the emancipationists may fail in effecting their object; but I deny that the Colonization Society is worthy of patronage, whether it fail in its objects, or effect them. It is based on a violation of Christian duty, as I have endeavored to show; and hence, whatever may be the results which it can accomplish, I cordially and unconditionally decline its fellowship and affinity. Sooner would I cast a thousand dollars into the ocean, than cast a dollar into the treasury of that Society. What the ocean ingulfed would effect no evil, though it effected no good; but what the Colonization Society ingulfed might cause the death of a fellow being. These sentiments are not the result of heat and debate, but the cool and deliberate dictates of my judgment, and as long cherished by me as the existence of the Colonization Society. Till lately, I knew not but I stood alone in these views; but I perceive they are becoming common.

Some gentlemen argue this question as if its merits depended on the ability or inability of the Colonization Society to remove all the blacks to Africa. I differ from these gentlemen. The inability of the Society to perform its objects is all that will redeem it from the execration of posterity; precisely as the inability of Nero to effect his object, (when he wished that all Rome had but one neck, that he might behead the whole race at a blow,) is all that redeems his character. Heaven, in its kindest mercy, has not made our powers of executing evil equal to the enormity of our conceptions. Are we men, are we husbands, are we fathers, and shall we possess no better motive for opposing this Society, than that it cannot yield up to the devouring pestilence of Africa—that it cannot crowd into the black hole of Calcutta, one sixth part of the whole human race that inhabits these states?

We argue the question as though nothing were to be consulted but the prejudices, and feelings, and interests of the



whites. I will never consent to argue it on such a basis. I deny that we possess any right thus to argue it, but the right of power; and hence, whether the Colonization Society can accomplish its objects, has no bearing on the question at issue, till we have established that the objects of the Society are conscientious and right. I have endeavored to show that they are unconscientious and wrong; that they trample on that fundamental command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," which our Savior deemed of equal dignity with our love to God, and which, together, he declared comprehend all religion. Christianity and this Society cannot live together. Choose ye this night which ye will serve.

For myself, I deny being a partizan on this question. The views which I have uttered are my own; I have never read a paragraph written professedly against the Colonization Society, or in favor of emancipation. I have never before spoken on this question, and have never canvassed its merits, except in the privacy of my own thoughts. Invited by public handbill, as we have all been, to discuss the question, I have availed myself of the opportunity to speak with the candor that is the privilege of freedom. I have already disclaimed all imputation against the motives of any man; and so far from possessing the slightest hostility to the dignified, able, and I have no doubt amiable gentleman, who addressed us on Thursday evening as the agent of the Colonization Society, I feel no little pain, nay, I feel great pain in saying any thing that shall by the remotest possibility interfere with his feelings, his views and interests. His deportment, his talents, and I may say his appearance, excite in me the most kindly prepossessions toward him; still, let him not complain, (as I thought he did on Thursday,) of the sentiments which are uttered against his Society, even by a brother in the ministry;\* for, if I am not misinformed, this discussion is the offspring of his own invitation;† and, if I

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\* The Rev. BERIAH GREEN, President of the Oneida Institute, a gentleman whose controversial powers seem of a very high order, and who, during several whole evenings, spoke for the negative of the question with an animation and pathos that absorbed the attention of the whole audience.

† This assertion was contradicted by the friends of the agent. They said the invi-

correctly understood him that evening, he deemed opposition propitious to his interests. It added, I think he said, many thousands to the funds of his Society. In one respect I am happy to hear the declaration. I hope none of us shall ever find our interests promoted by suppressing discussion. Let discussion be ever held dear and sacred. Providence has constituted us to differ, and Providence will not permit this feature of our nature to be injurious, though we sometimes, in the tyranny of selfishness, would suppress its exhibition.

Look at our national legislature; and to what but conflicting opinion are we indebted for the exaltation that we discover. Men, who by the mere favor of their neighbors leave home not distinguished from the common mass of man, coursing along the surface of society like a ripple on the unruffled bosom of the ocean, are presently, in their new situation, fretted into a wave; and, surging upwards and onwards, by the mighty energy of conflicting opinion, bear aloft on their bosom the whole fabric of society, and seem to us, who gaze on them from the unmoved surface of the world, like beings whom we can scarcely recognize as our fellows.

Let us then not complain of a principle thus productive of good, but rather let us tolerate each other's views; and while I solicit this most humbly for the vote which conscience compels me to give on this occasion, I am anxious to declare that I shall respect no man the less for finding him diametrically and ardently opposed to me in his conclusions.

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NOTE.—A gentleman who was present at the delivery of the preceding remarks, has called on the speaker to review the declarations which treat disparagingly the virtue and attainments of colored men. The speaker never asserted that they are naturally inferior to other men, nor is he possessed of any reasons or feelings for such an assertion. The picture which he drew of colored men conforms to the limited acquaintance with them that his secluded habits have afforded. That even this country (with its discouraging prejudices,) possesses colored men of virtue, wealth, and literature, he is happy to possess this gentleman's assertion for believing; and the more of such instances are substantiated, the greater will be his gratification.

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tation came from some friends of the Colonization cause, and was merely acquiesced in by the agent.









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